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ABSTRACT

Most small, rural schools are not equipped to provide each and every student with an education which provides students with learning experiences that are necessary for the development of basic academic and non-academic skills. Therefore, small, rural schools need to identify and utilize the various human, natural, and social resources which comprise the community. Great potential exists within the community for student learning and basic skills development. The New Hampshire Supervisory School Union 58's Experimental Schools (ES) project has developed a diverse strategy for incorporating out-of-school, community oriented student activities into the total learning process. The instructional strategy includes field trips, guest speakers, an environmental education nature study site, and student placement at training sites. By using community resource sites and employing the talents of skilled community members in the education process, the small, rural school that has limited instructional resources can supplement student learning and basic skills development. Thus, the individual student, upon leaving the formal K-12 instructional process, will have marketable skills, can successfully compete for work, and/or further his formal education. (NQ)

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THE UTILIZATION OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES FOR STUDENT LEARNING IN RURAL SCHOOLS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Since July 1973, Richard Peters has been Director of the New Hampshire Supervisory School Union 58 Experimental Schools project - funded by the National Institute of Education, Washington, DC .

Mr. Peters received his Bachelor of Science in Education and Master's of Education degrees from the University of Maine, Orono. The Doctor of Education degree was granted by the University of Rochester, New York, in 1971.

Since assuming the position of Director of the Union 58 ES project, Dr. Peters has been directly responsible for the development and implementation of comprehensive (Kindergarten through grade twelve) programs in career/vocational education, language arts, and environmental/outdoor education - as well as community oriented adult education and teacher in-service education programs.

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The American rural school is but one facet in the character of the total community. Each and every day, the school is effected by the community and, in turn, effects the life of its populace - young and old alike.

Most small, rural schools do not possess all of the necessary tools needed to provide each and every student with a quality education; that is, an education which provides students with learning experiences that are necessary for the development of basic academic and non-academic skills.

In order to provide all students with basic skills development activities and learning experiences, there is a need for small, rural schools to identify and utilize the various resources of the community; those human, natural, and social resources which comprise the community.

The New Hampshire Supervisory School Union 58's NIE funded Experimental Schools (ES) project has developed a diverse strategy for incorporating out-of-school, community oriented student activities into the total learning process.

The instructional strategy includes: field trips; guest speakers; the creation and utilization of an environmental

education nature study site; and student placement at training sites.

FIELD TRIPS

"Groups of students are taken out into the community to both observe and interact with local area resources." [1]

The field trip is an instructional method whereby students leave the classroom and go into the environment of the community for purposes of learning more about the day-to-day lives of community members, and to develop their awareness and perceptions of the character of life space phenomena.

GUEST SPEAKERS

Community resource people appear in classrooms for purposes of meeting with students; to discuss their jobs, the community, and the everyday life of the citizenry.

For those community resource sites which are 'off limits' to students, guest speakers can appear before student groups in the school setting and can discuss - as well as graphically show - the site characteristics and

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[1] Peters, Richard, "The Utilization of Natural, Social and Human Community Resources In The Process Of Student Career Awareness Development". AERA Report, April 1976, pgs. 7-8.

day-to-day processes.

Guest speakers can also provide live demonstrations for students and can address themselves to specific student interests - as well as answer their questions.

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION NATURE SITE(S)

Environmental education sites are areas of the community which are set aside and developed for purposes of student exposure to and interaction with facets of the natural surroundings.

Within this/these clearly defined nature site area(s) can be found a series of trails, experimental study stations, and clearly identified natural phenomena.

The EE nature site(s) is/are a microcosm of the total natural community environment. The selected area(s) is/are locations - within the context of the total community; that geographical setting which encompasses man-made as well as natural phenomena - to which students can go to conduct nature studies and to develop both a knowledge and an appreciation of the natural world about them.

The development of the nature site area(s) can be a student project, a shared project involving students and parents, or a community social organization's project for community betterment and the advancement of learning.

TRAINING SITES

Out-of-school training site experiences should be skills development in nature; that is to say, planned opportunities for students to learn basic skills at a learning site other than the school setting. Site experiences should be skills development (training) in nature rather than actual work without wages. These experiences should be learning activities rather than opportunities for skills application (work).

Students should be rotated through several occupational areas in a training site experience cycle and not stay too long in any one skills area. Ideally, students should be rotated not only within a site but between sites.

A site placement program should strive to identify the 'entry level' ability of each student - prior to being placed at a site. Once the 'entry level' has been determined, then a site experience can be planned which will provide adequate time for skills development - but will not be so long in duration that the student reaches the point, at which time the site experience ceases to provide for skills development (training) but rather encourages and provides the opportunity for skills application (work).

In order to properly determine the student's ability or degree of skills development in a vocational skill area prior to his/her placement, standardized/commercial aptitude tests or other measurement devices such as an occupational awareness inventory should be used. Two inventories are readily available for such purposes. They are The Career Awareness Inventory; published by Scholastic Testing Service, 480 Meyer Road, Bensenville, Illinois 60106, and The Career Maturity Inventory; published by CTB/McGraw-Hill, Del Monte Research Park, Monterey, California 93940.

By predetermining entry level abilities/skills, site placement planners can better identify student needs and can select sites, develop performance objectives, and determine periods of site placement time which best enhance student learning and skills development.

There are several pre-placement activities which must be undertaken and accomplished before students actually begin site experiences.

1. ADEQUATE TEACHER TRAINING - to provide a basis for teacher understanding of the purpose(s) and value(s) of student site placement.

2. IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENT ENTRY LEVEL ABILITIES/SKILLS - a basis for establishing site experience performance objectives and determining the period of site placement time.

3. EMPLOYERS/SITE SUPERVISORS MUST BE ORIENTED TO THE PROCESS OF STUDENT TRAINING - to understand that the site placement experience is to serve specific purposes (stated performance objectives) and to make site supervisors aware of each student's site entry level abilities/skills development.

4. PARENTS MUST BE THOROUGHLY INFORMED - as to the purpose(s) for student site placement.

Once a site has been identified, performance objectives have been developed and agreed upon, and the student has been placed, there is a need to create a student progress monitoring system. This system should serve the purpose of determining whether stated performance objectives are being/have been met and to guarantee that the student is benefiting educationally from the experience.

The system should include:

1. periodic site supervisor's evaluations; oral and written, of student performance and objectives attainment.

2. student weekly reports; oral and written, as to site

activities, skills development, and perceived levels of objectives attainment - as well as site supervision.

3. the supervising program coordinator's periodic written evaluations of student progress and site appropriateness for goals/objectives attainment.

There are several 'rules-of-thumb' which must be adhered to when placing students at community resource sites - for purposes of skills development and hands-on experiences.

The site placement program must strive to guarantee that:

1. site training and skills development activities and experiences are similar to that training and to those skills development activities and experiences given in a vocational program.

2. the site training is for the benefit of the student(s) and serves the attainment of predetermined performance objectives.

3. due to the fact that the student is placed as a trainee at a site-for purposes of skills development and not for skills application (work), the student does not displace regular employees.

4. because the student(s) is/are placed at a site for training and not to work - that the employer/site supervisor

who provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the student - and that on occasion his/her operations may actually be impeded.

5. the student(s) is/are not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the training period.

6. the employer/site supervisor and the student(s) understand that the student(s) is/are not entitled to wages for the time spent at the site in training. This understanding must be made clear to parents - and the arrangement must be agreeable to them as well.

7. students should not be placed at sites where they would come in contact with any facet of an occuaption that is considered hazardous.

In short, the purposes for student site placement are to supplement the existing instructional facilities of the small, rural school with those facilities and human resources found at community resource sites, and to provide students with opportunities to develop basic vocational skills as well as to gain practical hands-on experiences.

By using community resource sites and employing the talents of skilled community members in the education process, the small, rural school that has limited instructional resources can

supplement student learning and basic skills development - thus helping to produce a product; the individual student, who - upon leaving the formal Kindergarten through grade twelve instructional process called 'schooling' - will develop marketable skills, can successfully compete for work, and/or further his/her formal education - if so desired.

There is great potential within the community for student learning and basic skills development - if only this fact is realized and the resources are identified.